

## Selfie posting behaviors are associated with narcissism among men



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### ABSTRACT

Although many studies have investigated individual differences in online social networking, few have examined the recent and rapidly popularized social phenomenon of the “selfie” (a selfportrait photograph of oneself). In two studies with a pooled sample of 1296 men and women, we tested the prediction that individuals who score high on four narcissism sub-scales (Self-sufficiency, Vanity, Leadership, and Admiration Demand) will be more likely to post selfies to social media sites than will individuals who exhibit low narcissism. We examined three categories of selfies: own selfies; selfies with a romantic partner; and group selfies, controlling for non-selfie photographs. Women posted more selfies of all types than did men. However, women’s selfie-posting behavior was generally unrelated to their narcissism scores. In contrast, men’s overall narcissism scores positively predicted posting own selfies, selfies with a partner, and group selfies. Moreover, men’s Vanity, Leadership, and Admiration Demand scores each independently predicted the posting of one or more types of selfies. Our findings provide the first evidence that the link between narcissism and selfie-posting behavior is comparatively weak among women than men, and provide novel insight into the social motivations and functions of online social networking.

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### 1. Introduction

Social media, including online social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, have developed at an extreme rate over the last several years (Chou, Hunt, Beckjord, Moser, & Hesse, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Common usages of social media, and its relative novelty, are related to an emergence of new psychological and social phenomena (Back et al., 2010; Błachnio, Przepiórka, & Rudnicka, 2013; Houghton & Joinson, 2010; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Ross et al., 2009), some of which have yet to be thoroughly investigated.

Many researchers have examined individual differences in social media usage. The results of these studies suggest that social media activity is related to characteristics of the Five Factor Model (Ross et al., 2009; Ryan & Xenos, 2011) and jealousy (Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009). Narcissism has also been shown to predict online social activity. Researchers have found that individuals characterized by relatively elevated narcissism are egocentric, have a sense of grandiosity, dominance, and entitlement, and

perceive themselves as more attractive and better than others, but – importantly – are still marked by insecurity (Fox & Rooney, 2015; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Researchers studying narcissism have generally suggested a positive association between this characteristic and social media usage (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Carpenter, 2012; Lee, Ahn, & Kim, 2014; McKinney, Kelly, & Duran, 2012; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Ryan & Xenos, 2011). However, closer examination of previous studies reveals many negative results, methodological limitations, or only partial confirmation of this thesis (Deters, Mehl, & Eid, 2014; McKinney et al., 2012; Panek, Nardis, & Konrath, 2013; Skues, Williams, & Wise, 2012).

Because narcissists tend to be exhibitionistic, attention seeking, and highly concerned with their physical appearance (Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008), it seems logical to predict that narcissistic individuals may be more likely to post their pictures on social media than others. Narcissism has been found to be a significant predictor of the motivation for selecting profile pictures (Kapidzic, 2013), and narcissistic users are more likely to upload their attractive photos on social media than are less narcissistic users (Wang, Jackson, Zhang, & Su, 2012). Ong and colleagues (2011) additionally reported that narcissists assessed the attractiveness of their online pictures as unobjectively high (i.e., higher than ratings obtained from their peers). It remains unclear, however, whether narcissists post more pictures on social media than do others. For example, Ryan and Xenos (2011) did not find any

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significant relationship between narcissism and the number of profile pictures or number of tagged pictures posted on Facebook. Similar findings were reported by Ong and colleagues (2011).

Previous inconsistencies in studies examining links between narcissism and social media usage may be due to the possibility that narcissism is related to the posting of only a specific picture type, i.e., “selfies”. Because this word is relatively new and has yet to attain a definite, clear definition, we have operationalized the word selfie for the purpose of this study. Based on online dictionaries (Selfie, 2015a, 2015b) and other Internet sources we propose to define a selfie as: a self-portrait photograph of oneself (or of oneself and other people), taken with a camera or a camera phone held at arm’s length or pointed at a mirror, that is usually shared through social media. According to this definition (and consistent with real-life observations), selfies include not only self-portraits taken alone, but also photographs taken of oneself with a partner or a group of people.

Selfies in fact have a long history dating back to the early beginnings of photography. The first selfies are thought to have been taken independently by an American amateur photographer, Robert Cornelius, and an English inventor, Charles Wheatstone around the year 1840 (Wade, 2014). However, the most dynamic development in this phenomenon is its extreme and recent increase in usage in social media. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word selfie was first used in 2002, and already within a decade, “selfie” was chosen as Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year (Selfie, 2015a). Indeed, the word’s frequency increased in usage by 17,000% between the years 2012 and 2013. Presently, selfies are taken by millions of people all over the world every day, including politicians (Presidents Obama and Putin and the previous Iranian President Ahmadinejad), actors, musicians, sportsmen, and even astronauts in outer space. Surprisingly, there are practically no psychological studies regarding selfies, with the exception of one recent study assessing trait predictors of social networking site usage (Fox & Rooney, 2015). In this study, Fox & Rooney found that narcissism and psychopathy predicted the number of selfies posted by men.

Although the current study is not meant to be a replication of this work, as we began conducting the research before Fox and Rooney’s paper was published, our findings are an interesting extension of their results. In the present study, we are the first to test whether narcissism predicts selfie posting behavior in both men and women. In addition to analyzing the results separately for each sub-scale of narcissism (Self-sufficiency, Vanity, Leadership, and Admiration Demand), we divided selfie posting behavior into three meaningful categories: own selfies, selfies with a romantic partner, and group selfies, controlling for the total number of photos (excluding selfies) posted by each participant on social media sites. Moreover, conducting our study in Poland enables us to draw some conclusions regarding the cultural universality of relationships between narcissism and taking selfies.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Participants

Study 1 included a total of 748 people (355 women and 393 men) aged between 17 and 47 years ( $M = 21.64$ ;  $SD = 3.41$ ). The participants were recruited from various university campuses across Poland. Study 2 included a total of 548 Facebook users (330 women and 218 men) aged between 14 and 47 years ( $M = 23.72$ ;  $SD = 4.39$ ), none of whom took part in Study 1. These participants were recruited through personal contacts by the authors and students of the authors’ University. All participants

provided informed consent prior to their inclusion in the study and were not compensated for their participation.

### 2.2. Measures

All participants completed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988) Polish adaptation (Bazinska & Drat-Ruszczak, 2000). The Polish adaptation of the test revealed a different structure of narcissism than did the original version. The Polish scale consists of four factors (see Fig. 1).

Two scales: *Self-sufficiency* (Cronbach’s alpha for the Polish version – .70) and *Vanity* (Cronbach’s alpha for the Polish version – .76) were nearly identical to the original scales. However, in the Polish version, Authority also included a conviction that one has influence over others (e.g., high scores were related to the question, “I am talented in influencing others”). Therefore, the name of the Authority subscale was changed to *Leadership* (Cronbach’s alpha for the Polish version – .86). The scale *Admiration Demand* (Cronbach’s alpha for the Polish version – .86) reflects a need to be meaningful, noticed, admired, complimented by others and famous (Bazinska & Drat-Ruszczak, 2000).

We examined three categories of selfies: own selfies; selfies with a romantic partner; and group selfies (i.e., taken with one or more individuals, excluding ones romantic partner). We also examined the total number of photos (excluding selfies) posted by each participant on social media. In Study 1, we measured the self-assessed number of photos posted during the previous month on all types of online social networking sites (including Bliip, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Whatsapp, and two Polish sites, Fotka and Nasza Klasa). In Study 2, we measured the actual, total number of photos posted by each participant on Facebook.

### 2.3. Procedure

In Study 1, all participants completed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire containing questions related to their personality and their selfie-sharing activity during the previous month. We asked participants to count and report all types of selfies and non-selfie photos presented/uploaded/shared by the participants on all social media sites (including Bliip, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and two Polish sites, Fotka and Nasza Klasa) and those shared with the use of text messages or instant messaging applications (e.g., WhatsApp or Snapchat) in the past 30 days. Participants were recruited by the

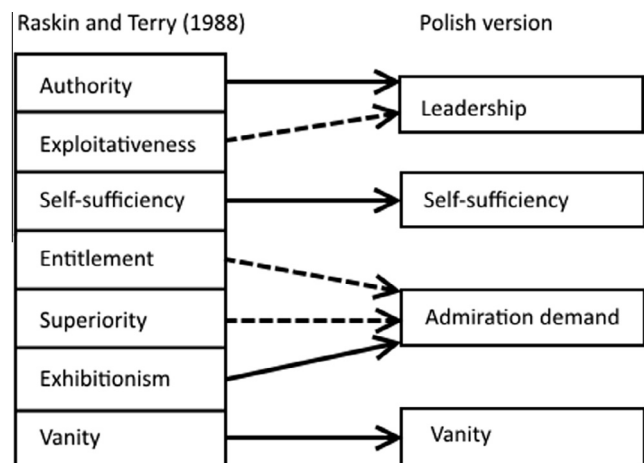


Fig. 1. Differences between narcissism subscales in the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin and Terry, 1988) and the Polish version of this test (Bazinska and Drat-Ruszczak, 2000). The comparison is based on Bazinska and Drat-Ruszczak (2000).

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